

# A New Note on Daily *Pujas* and Annual Festivals of Mahakaleshwar Temple at Irumbai

**Mrs. N. Santhi**, PhD. Research Scholar, Part Time (External), Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar

**Dr. S. Thanigaivelan**, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar

**Dr. R. Velmurugan**, Associate Professor, Department of History, K. M Center for P.G Studies (Autonomous) Lawspet, Puducherry.

**Dr. K. Govindaraj**, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Thiru. A. Govindasamy Govt. Arts College, Tindivanam.

Corresponding Author - Dr. K. Govindaraj

## Abstract

*Pujas* and festivals fashioned an integral part of temple worship. The daily worship in a temple is known as *nitya Pujas*. In the Mahakaleshwar temple at Irumbai, daily four *sandhi Pujas* are being performed. Besides *Pujas*, rites and rituals, many annual festivals accomplished in temples fetch many people to take part in the ritualistic pilgrimage of the deities. The festivals imitate the religious bent of mind of the people, their social blending, their vows etc. On this special day, special *abhisheka*, special offerings and special *pujas* are being performed to the principal God, Goddess and other minor deities of this temple. Thus, this paper throws light on the above-mentioned *Pujas* and festivals are some of the important celebrations conducted in the Irumbai, Mahakaleshwar temple often with pomp and glory and many annual festivals conducted in this temple on various occasions throughout the year.

**Key Words** : *atmarta Pujas, paramarta Pujas, sandhi Pujas, Nitya Pujas, Naimittika Pujas, Prathana Pujas* and *Kamika Pujas*,

Irumbai is a medium village situated next to Auroville in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and 10 km from Pondicherry. An ancient temple dedicated to Lord Siva. The presiding deity is known as Mahakaleshwar, Maga Kalanathar and Goddess Madusundaranayagi Amman alias Kuyilmozhiammai. The presiding deity was praised by Saint Thirunganasambathar in his Devaram hymns. *Pujas* can be classified as *atmarta Pujas* and *paramarta Pujas*<sup>1</sup>. *Atmarta Pujas* reflects the *Pujas*, performed by the celebrant for the welfare of himself and his family in his own house in accordance to his capacity. Siva *Pujas* are classified into three parts, namely (i) *nitya Pujas or sandhi Pujas*, or daily *Pujas*,<sup>2</sup> (ii) *naimittika Pujas or* monthly *Pujas* on auspicious days, and (iii) *Kamika Pujas or prathana Pujas* by private worshippers. *Paramarta Pujas* is executed in the temple by the principal priest (*archakar*) in accordance to the *Agama*<sup>3</sup> rules for the general welfare of all the devotees.

*Pujas* and festivals fashioned an integral part of temple worship. A sacred house of Gods and Goddesses, temples became a pivot around, which people accumulate to think of God and worship to them. Worshipping Gods in temples not only pervade divinity and sanctity into the hearts of the devotees, but their religious instincts and estimations find a natural outlet. The mass whispered that if Gods and Goddesses were appeased, there would be sufficient rain and enormous prosperity. Therefore, extravagant rituals and ceremonies, where rapidly progressed and divine beings were pleased with offerings of *abhishekhas* (sacred bath) oblations, rites, rituals and festivals. *Pujas* means worship accompanied by certain procedures and

offerings. It generates a kind of sacred favor. The temple becomes a place of worship, where people gather to consider of God and pray to him. This Siva temple, in its majestic has been withstanding wind and weather in the past Ten centuries. The sculptural artifacts of this century old temple with its architecture and sculpture art speak volumes of the art and architecture of the later Cholas.

The succeeding generations of rulers and rich devotees may have, every now and then or on occasions maintained the temple. The deep-rooted devotion and a desire to maintain the temples and sacred places have not gone off, in spite of a pseudo-rationalistic, iconoclastic and atheistic view. When thousands of devotees, men, women and children thronged not only from the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu but also from all over India. The very look of the temple was colorful even at a distance on festival occasions. The archakas, specially brought in, distinctly chanted the *vedic slokas* on the occasion anointed first and then poured the holy waters on all deities of the temple.

### **Nitya Pujas**

The daily worship in a temple is known as *nitya Pujas*. The *nitya Pujas* are of three kinds as mentioned in *agamas* namely *uttamam*, *madhyamam* and *adhamam*. The eight *sandhi Pujas* are called *uttamam*. Usually, eight *sandhi Pujas* are not performed. Among these six *sandhi Pujas* are called *uttamam*, four *sandhi Pujas* are called *madhyamam* and two *sandhi Pujas* are called *adhamam*. In this temple Irumbai Mahakaleswarar six *sandhi Pujas* are called *madhyamam* conducted even now.<sup>4</sup>

The ritual in a temple consists of four celebrations, which take place at sunrise, noon, sunset and mid-night. However, the number of times the ceremonial worship is to be conducted depends on the tradition and the *agamas*, which govern the particular temple. In the Mahakaleswarar temple at Irumbai, daily four *sandhi Pujas* are being performed. They are (i) *kalasandhi* (morning *Pujas*) from 6.00 to 8.00 a.m., (ii) *Ucchikalam* (mid-day noon *Pujas*) from 11.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon., (iii) *Sayaratchai* (evening *Pujas*) from 5.00 p.m. to 6.00p.m., (iv) *Arthajamam* (night *Pujas*) from 8.00 p.m. to 08.30p.m., At present, the above *Pujas* are performed in this temple.

### **Kalasantidhi**

*Kalasantidhi Pujas* commences after sunrise that is at 6.00 a.m. This *Pujas* is completed before 8.00 a.m. The salient feature of this *Puja* is that all the deities of the whole temple completely receive *abhishekas* and *aradanas*. The Mahakaleswarar is anointed with gingili oil, and a sacred bath is given with *abhisheka* powder, rice flour, turmeric powder, milk, sugar, honey, tender coconut water, curd, fruit juice, *vibhuti* (sacred ash), ghee, rose water and *Svarnaand kalasa* water. After the *abhisheka*, the deity is decorated with fresh flowers, garlands, dresses, ornaments, *vibhuti* mark and sandal paste. Then *pushpanjali* (floral offerings) follows with utterances of mantras. On special occasions, *archana* is performed with *vilva* leaves. The camphor flame is showed in front of the deity clockwise to the sound of the bell. Then Ganapati, Muruga, Amman, Durgai and Dhakshnamurthi get their offerings. *Neivedya* for this *Pujas* consists of plain cooked rice (*sutannam*). This *Pujas* is completed with the ceremony of *prarthana bali*, in which the remaining food is deposited on the *balipitha*.<sup>5</sup>

### **Ucchikalam**

*Ucchikala Pujas* or the mid-day worship occurs between 11.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon. In this *Pujas*, *padikkattalai* (ablution) is held in the sanctum of the God and in the shrine of Goddess. Curd rice is the principal meal offered as *neivedya*. With this *Pujas*, the forenoon *Pujas* gets to their end. The temple is kept closed from 12.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

### **Sayaratchai**

Again, this temple is re-opened at 4.30 p.m., for the evening worship. *Sayaratchai Pujas* is performed before sunset, that is, between 5.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m. This *Pujas* is a repetition of the morning *Pujas* in an abbreviated scale. *Pongal* is the *neivedya* for this *Pujas*. The salient feature of this *Pujas* is that during this *Pujas neivedya* and *diparadhana* is performed for Lord Nataraja.

### **Arthajamam**

*Arthajamam Pujas* or the night worship occurs between 08.00 p.m. and 08.30 p.m., at present, the

above *Pujas* are performed in this temple. The reason is that Lord Nataraja performed his evening cosmic dance (*Sandhya tandava*) only during the interval, when the sun was about to set. *neivedya* and *diparadhana* are first performed for Vinayaka and then they are offered to Nataraja, Muruga, Dhakshnamoorthi, Durgai, Annamalaiyar and Nandhi. The *Pujas* ends with offerings to Amman temple. During the *Pujas*, the *oduvār* (hymn chanter) stands before Mahakaleshwarar singing Devararn hymns.<sup>6</sup>

Besides *Pujas*, rites and rituals, many annual festivals accomplished in temples fetch many people to take part in the ritualistic pilgrimage of the deities. Primarily religious in nature, these annual festivals offer to fulfill religious obligations. This is known in Tamil *tirunal*. The annual festivals are occasions of social assemblage and pleasure. People gather around a temple and they are so organized in accordance to the seasonal and climate. Generally annual festivals are arranged either after planting of crops or harvesting. Festivals have been performed throughout the Tamil Nadu and India<sup>7</sup>.

Hindu religion perceives a larger number of annual festivals, than any other religion. "No house without guest hospitality - a month without annual festivals is necessary for the happiness of people, prosperity and the country's progress. The festivals are celebrated to honor seasons, and religious, social and cultural changes of the world.

Festivals have played a very important part in bringing cohesiveness among individuals and social communities. The people enjoy the festivals, and on such occasions, they are free from their household work and go out for participating in various kinds of ceremonial activities of the temple. Temple festivals not only give solace and succor to the religious minded people, but also serve as a boon to the commercial people. The monthly festival Prathosam, the annual festivals Karthigai, Thai *Pusam*, Maha Sivaratri, Masi Magam and Panguni Utiram, and special annual festival Brahmotsavam are some of the notable festivals of this temple.

Every year on auspicious asterism and occasions without any unconventionality, number of festivals is prepared. The festivals imitate the religious bent of mind of the people, their social blending, their vows etc.<sup>8</sup> They are planned on basis of the movements of stars and particular asterism. The auspicious days and times will be fixed earlier due to the almanac. The festivals are organized on the basis of the *amirtha paksham* or *sukkila saksham* i.e., waning or waxing moon period i.e., on lunar months. Both the Saivites and Vaishnavites give importance to auspicious days and festivals. *Thiruvadhirai* is the asterism auspicious for the Saivites while *thiruvonam* is auspicious for Vishnu. During festival days special processions are also arranged. So, they should know the facts about the festivals of the Mahakaleshwar temple. It will be helpful and suitable to have the festivals arranged during every Tamil month in this temple. As it is an *agamic* temple rituals and festivals are arranged in accordance with.<sup>9</sup>

### The Weekly festivals

An inscription<sup>10</sup> of Rajaraja I chola issued in his 26th regnal year (A.D. 1011-1012), mentions that the weekly festival is conducted on every Sunday. For this purpose, the gold was donated to this temple. At present the weekly festival is celebrated Fridays. On such occasions, the bronze of Amman Goddess is decorated beautifully and taken out in circumbulation inside the premises of the Amman temple.

### Pradosham

*Pradosha Pujas* is exclusive in Siva temples as worship in the evening. It falls twice a month on *trayodasi (thithi)*, heralded by two days on *amavasai* and *pournami*. In Accordance with the legendary history, Siva required to save the devas from the poison, which came out, when the ocean of milk was churned, on an *trayodasi* day, which occurred to be a Saturday. In order to bless and please the devas, Siva is said to have stood between the two horns of *vrishabha* during *pradosha* time (5.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.) in the presence of *devas*, *rishis* and *bhuta ganas* and rendered cosmic *sandhya* tandava. Therefore, *pradosha* occurring on a Saturday is measured to be superior to other *pradosha* days. Most devotees prefer to pray to Lord Siva or remain in the Siva temple the *pradosha* period. Devotees, fasting on the *pradosha* day, break their fasting after the evening prayer.

In this temple, the *nitya Pujas* of the evening takes place along with *pradosha Pujas*. As soon as the 'musical instruments start sounding, *nandi* found in front of the *dvajastambha* is smeared with milk, curd, honey and rose water. Then *rudrakshabhisheka* is performed after adorning it with *rudrakshamala*. Then the

body of *nandi* is dressed with a huge white *dhoti*. Garlands of *arugambul*, *Vilva* leaves and flowers are placed and sandal paste and vermilion are applied to the forehead and *neivedya* consisting of *ghee* and raw rice is placed in the mouth of Nandi and then the priest offers *diparadhana* to *nandi*. Later the *abhisheka* to the presiding deity commences. The *abhisheka* consists of oil, milk, curd, *panchamrta*, tender coconut water, sandal paste, rose water and holy ash. Plain rice is offered as *neivedya* and *soda sobhachara* is performed. Finally, on *Pradosha* days Nayanar is well decorated and seated on *vrishabha vahana*, which goes round the inner prakara. Sacrificial offerings are prepared in all the eight directions. Then the *pradosha* Nayanar is engaged to *Kalyana Mandapa* and after *diparadhana*, Swami and Amman is alighted from *vrishabha vahana* and taken to their respective places.

### **Krittikai**

In this temple, every month, on all *Krittika* days on accomplishment of the Erandakalam, *abhisheka*, *alankara* and *diparadhana* are done for Lord Subramanya with Valli and Devasena. Then the bronze idol of Lord Subramanya, Valli and Devasena, well ornamented, are fixed on *mayura* vahana (peacock vehicle) and taken around the *prakara* and placed in the *Kalyana Mandapa* for worship.<sup>11</sup>

### **Chithirai Varudappirappu Tamil New Year Day and Chitra Pournami (April – May) Festival**

On this special day special *abhisheka*, special offerings and special *pujas* are being performed to the principal God and Goddess and other minor deities of this temple. In the evening new *panjangam* is read by the temple priests on *Chitra Pournami Puja* i.e., the full moon day of *Chithirai*. The Tamil New Year *Chithirai Varudappirappu* festival is celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month *Chithirai*. It is whispered that Lord Brahma began his creative activities on this day. In the evening on special day, special *abhisheka* is also being offered to Lord Brahma and primal deity Mahakaleshwar of this temple. This prevalent festival is also a momentous one celebrated in a grand manner in this temple.

The *Chitra Pournami* festival was of great position to our ancestors from time immemorial and its antiquity can be traced to the Post Sangam epic 'Silapadhikaram', where it is stated that Lord Indra and Lord Vishnu were celebrated with grandeur. On the full moon day (*Chitra Pournami*) at late evening a special puja is performed for all Gods and Goddesses of this temple.<sup>12</sup>

### **Vaikasi, (May - June) Brahmotsavam Festival**

During this month, *Brahmotsavam* the special annual festival is celebrated for ten days. On all the ten days the temple will be decorated and illuminated with lights and special *Pujas* too will be arranged. On the *visakam* day of *vaikasi*, the *sthala Murthis* are taken out on a procession of the village. On the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the Tamil month *vaikasi* the celebration of offering of sacred milk to Thirugnanasambandar is carried out in a grand manner. On the next day arrangements are made for offering *muthu pandal* to Manickavasagar. On these two days the temple will be in festive mood. The devotees celebrate this festival in an effective way.

### **Brahmotsavam**

This festival is celebrated in the Tamil month of Vikasi for Fourteen days. Before the *Brahmotsavam*, a special *abhisheka* and pita is performed to Lord Vinayaka. This is called Vigneswara *puja*. *Yagas* are performed at the *yaga sala*, and *Pidari urchavam* is also conducted. This festival starts by hoisting the flag, having a picture of the *Rishaba*, on the top of the flag stand (*dvajasthamba*) after due rituals. After that *Adikaranandi* is taken out in a retrocession on the first day. During the *Brahmotsavam*, the images of the Gods and Goddess, decorated with gold, silver jewelry and colourful flowers, are carried out in procession mounted on various *vahanas* to different *mandagapadis* arranged by the temple authorities.<sup>13</sup>

The second day of the festival is the festival of Lord Chandrasekara and his consort. In the *kalyana mandapa* situated in the northern side of the first *prakara*, *abhisheka* is conducted to the processional idol of Lord Chandrasekara and his consort. Then they are taken out in a procession on *Chandraprabai vahana*. On the third day, the *Urchavar purappadu* of Lord Mahakaleshwar takes place. The God, along with other deities, is taken out in *budha vahana*. On the fourth day, main deity is taken out in procession on naga vahana in the evening celebration.

The fifth day of the festival is quite significant because Panchamurtis Vinayaka, Muruga, Chandikesvara and *Thani* Amman are anointed and decorated and special *dipaaradhanas* are performed to

the deities. On the same night, Panchamurtis are taken out from *kalyana mandapa* in procession round the four main treats of the temple.

On the sixth and seventh days, the images of Lord Mahakaleshwar and Kuyilmozhiammai are brought and placed in the *kalyana mandapa*. On the night bathing and feast of the God and Goddess take place on a grand scale. The deities are taken out in procession mounted on *Indra vimana* and *Kailaya vahana* respectively. On the morning of eighth day, *abhisheka* and *aradhana* are conducted for *Panchamurtis*. On the same night, wedding ceremony is performed for the *Panchamurtis* and a procession of the images takes place.<sup>14</sup>

On the ninth day the most important Festival takes place. In the morning a special *abhisheka* is performed for Lord Vinayaka. The main deity, decorated with jewels, in his Palanquin and procession took place main streets at Irumbai. This is the most attractive and colorful celebration. This celebration is sponsored by the temple management. The tenth day is the end of the *Brahmotsavam* Festival. On the morning, a special *abhisheka* is performed to Lord Nataraja and then a procession is undertaken. Subsequently, the temple flag is dropped down. This marks the end of *Brahmotsavam* festival. Finally, the celebration of *Thirumanjanam* put an end to this festival. Thus, the above-mentioned *Pujas* and festivals are some of the important celebrations conducted in the Irumbai Mahakaleshwar temple often with pomp and glory. Besides these, there are also many festivals conducted in this temple on various occasions throughout the year.

### **Ani Thirumanjanam (June-July) Festival**

From the actual first day of the Tamil month *Ani*, the festival associated with Thirugnansambandar commences. On the first day the offering of *muthu pandal* by Siva to Thirugnansambandar takes place. This offering is made by the *bhudha ganas* of Siva. On that day, *Padigams* is singing on Mahakaleshwar. During that night Thirugnansambandar idol is taken out on procession. He is accompanied by Mahakaleshwar. This is a rare and popular festival in this temple because the renowned Thirugnansambandar devotee of Siva with real merit venerated by linking him with divine qualities. Thus, the conduct of a festival for the memorable activities of a devotional Tamil Saint and one among the 63 Saiva Nayanmars is also a unique festival by this temple.

The Other important festival Ani-Thirumanjanam (June-July) falls in the third month of Tamil year, Ani. On this occasion special *abisekha* and *aradhana* are offered to Mahakaleshwar. The deity is decorated at the mandapa of this temple. The idol of Lord Nataraja is made to swing in the *unjal* at the mandapa of this temple and then the decorated Nataraja is taken along the streets in a procession.<sup>15</sup>

### **Adi Puram (July – August) Festival**

Though the 18<sup>th</sup> of the Tamil month *Adi* is treated as auspicious, Amman festival it is treated as a month congenial for commencing agrarian pursuits. So far as this Mahakaleshwar temple is concerned, it is evident that important festivals are celebrated during this month. On all Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays special *Abhishekas* and rituals are arranged for the Goddess Madusundaranayagi Amman alias Kuyilmozhiammai.

The women devotees assemblage in large number in the temple during Tuesdays and Fridays to observe the celebrations and to enhance the spiritual merit of the Amman, art performances also coincide with festivals. The third Friday of that month is quite significant. Special rituals are arranged along with fireworks and crackers. The importance assigned to the Goddess Madusundaranayagi Amman alias Kuyilmozhiammai suggests the believes of the devotees in getting fertility and prosperity by worshipping that, Goddess. This also indicates that all the worships are undertaken purely based on faiths and beliefs. The *Adi Pooram* festival is celebrated in the Tamil month of Adi. On the pooram star day special celebration took place on auspicious day in honour of the Goddess Madusundaranayagi Amman alias Kuyilmozhiammai.

### **Avani Vinayaka Chathurthi (August – September) festival**

During this Tamil month special *Pujas* are arranged for Lord Nataraja. **Vinayaka Chathurthi**, which falls in this month, is celebrated in a appropriate manner. Special *Pujas* are arranged for Lord

Ganapathy. In this month on the *Sukla Paksham* day i.e., on the day of *Chathurthi* Vinayaka worship conducted in this temple in popular. On the day of **Avani mulam** the processional deity of the primary deities is taken on procession. Special rituals are also conducted.

### **Purattasi Navaratri , Vijayadasami (September – October) Festival**

*Navarathiri* is one of the imperative festivals of the temple. This festival is celebrated in praise of the Goddess Durgai killing mahishasura and freeing the devas from the persecutions of that asuras. Being a colorful festival, dances and music performances and religious discourses are arranged in the temple for nine days. The *Navarathiri* festival is celebrated in an apt way in this temple during this Tamil month. On all the days special rituals are arranged for Mahakaleshwar. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day **Vijayadasami** is celebrated. The Amman is taken out on procession on that day. **Saraswathi Puja**, which is celebrated by others, is also celebrated here. It is celebrated on the day earlier to **Vijayadasami**. The festival ends with **Vijayadasami**. This is celebrated as a day of success and it is believed that everything will be successful, when it is commenced on that day. This is also a festival known for its beliefs. It is mainly to keep away from the evil effects.<sup>16</sup>

### **Aippasi Skanda Sashti (October – November) Festival**

In the Tamil month of *Aippasi*, Special *abhishekam* is renowned in this temple in an auspicious day. In honour of Lord Muruga, the Skanda *sashti* festival is celebrated in the month of 'Aippasi' for six days. The festival of *soora samharam* is held on the 6<sup>th</sup> day. It is believed that on the day the Lord Muruga destroyed the asura called soorapadman and his followers. Skanda *Sashti* festival is celebrated with all pomp. The soora samharam (slaining the demon) is executed in a fitting manner. The Shanmughar of this temple is glorified during this month. The above mentioned Skanda *Sashti* will be celebrated in all the Murugan shrines and this temple does not lag behind. Devotees undertake *Sashti* fasting in this temple too continuously for six days. On all the *Sashti* days of every Tamil month special *Pujas* are arranged for Lord Shanmugam of this temple *Annabhishekam* is conducted in a grand manner of this month. The festival ends with the divine marriage between Lord Shanmuga and Devesena at the mandapa of this temple.<sup>17</sup>

### **Karthigai Thiru Karthikai Deepam (November – December) Festival**

During the Tamil month **Karthigai**, the **Somavaram** i.e., all Monday is treated as an auspicious one. On the days of Somavaram (every Monday of this month) special *Pujas* are performed to Mahakaleshwar and his Consort. On the fourth Monday the Sangabisheka is conducted in a grand manner. The **Karthigai** of that month is known as **Thirukarthigai** and is more important. The deity is taken out on procession along with Goddess Madusundaranayagi Amman alias Kuyilmozhiammai. Special **abhishegas** and rituals are conducted for Lord Subrahmanya. Bonfire is also arranged on that day. On the basis of **Karthigai**, a constellation of six stars pleader this festival is associated with Karthikeyan i.e., Murugan.<sup>18</sup>

They are taken in ceremonial procession around the prakara of this temple. Devotees from the surrounding villages gather in this temple to have a glimpse of the oblation on that particular day. **Karthikai Deepam** festival is intended for fire in the same month. Fire is one of five constituent elements along with other elements such as air, water, earth and sky, which make up the universe. **Karthikai Deepam** festival is one of the ancient festivals of the Tamils. People from surrounding villages of Irumbai such as Kottakarai, Alangkuppam and Aroville will gather much to participate in this festival. On this day, a special abhisheka is being made to Lord Murugan. On this evening the Idols of Vinayaga, Murugan, Valli and Deivanai are taken in a ceremonial procession with full decorations. At the time of procession huge beacons are set up on five important places of the streets. In front of each beacon the idols are placed and the beacon is set on fire with the lamp taken from this temple.

### **Margazhi (December – January) festival**

Among the Tamil months **Margazhi** is treated as a prominent one. *Margazhi Neeradal* i.e., taking bath in the early morning on all days in the month is undertaken by women as a holy measure. They even undertake *Pavai nonbu*. So, importance is assigned to Goddess Madusundaranayagi Amman alias Kuyilmozhiammai. Special rituals are arranged for Lord Nataraja on that day. That deity is also taken out on procession. On the new moon day of that month, the *Pancha Murthy* images are also taken out on procession. It is believed that this festival is arranged to remind the devotees of the removal of the sins. In

this month Arudra Darisanam conducted for ten days in a grand manner. Among the ten days the last three days special *Pujas* were conducted to Saint Tirugnanasambadar and Pillers of Saivism.

### **Tai Pongal, Pusam, Kiruthikai & Latcha Deepam Festival**

The Tamil month **Tai** is hailed as significant one by the Tamils, it is due to the harvest of ripened corns in paddy fields is carried out during this month. On the first day of this month the sweet *Pongal* is cooked by the Tamils because that *Pongal Thirunal* is a Tamil festival day. Special *Pujas* are arranged in the temple. In Tamil Nadu the Pongal festival otherwise known as in other states "Makara Sankaranthi" day is celebrated in a grand manner called Pongal *Pandigai*. It is celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month. Pongal is also celebrated to show gratitude to the sun, since the sun is essential for the growth of plants as well as for life on the earth. In short it is a Festival to honour nature. On this day a special abhishega with incense is held to the main God of this temple. During the Tamil month, the third day is known as *Kanum Pongal*. During this day special *Pujas* are performed to all deities like, Mahakaleshwar, Kuyilmozhiammami, Vishnu Durga and Dakshinamurthi, all the deities in a grand manner.

The *Tai Pusam* is also celebrated on that day of the asterism *Pusam*. On the day of the *Pusam*, *Theertham* is offered to the devotees. It is another belief that those, who are born on the asterism *uddhirattadhi*, if they worship the primary deity, they will be blessed with a child. It is also believed that they will get all the graces by the execution of the sacrifice on that day. The entire month is treated as a prosperous one. Thai Pusam festival is celebrated in connection with Lord Murugan. It is held on an auspicious day of Pusam or *Pushya* star appearing on this month. The devotees of Lord Muruga used to worship by going to this temple and carrying the *Kavadi* in a ceremonial procession in the streets. On this day special *Pujas* and *abhishekas* are performed for Lord Muruga of this temple. On the following night Lord Muruga on his '*vahana*' peacock is taken in a procession. People from almost all the surrounding areas would gather here to offer their prayers.

### **Thai Kiruthikai & Latcha Deepam**

Thai Kiruthikai day is celebrated with Latcha Deepam. This festival is performed in the temple. On the same night, Gods and Goddess decorated with jewels, colorful flowers, and silk dresses are placed on the beautiful floating raft logs with powerful lights. There are 1000 "*Agal Villaku*" lighting is made in the temple premises and then the God and Goddess are taken in a procession.

### **Masi Maha Sivararthiri and Masi Magam Festivals (January – February)**

The decorations made for the deities on that day will be captivating and absorbing. The **Sivararthiri** is a noteworthy festival celebrated in this month. It is one of the outstanding festivals of all the Siva temples including Mahakaleshwar temple Irumbai. During **Sivararthiri** even during night four times rituals and Special *Pujas* are performed. Besides *Masi Magam* is yet another important festival celebrated during this month **Masi**. On that day in addition to the normal routine *Pujas*, special *Pujas* are organized. The **Krishna Paksha Chaturthi** is celebrated in an attractive way. The decorations made for the deities on that day will be captivating and absorbing.

### **Panguni Uttiram (Feb – March) Festival**

Panguni uddhiram is an important festival during the month of **Panguni**. As rightly pointed out by Sekkilar in his **Periya Puranam**, it is believed that all those, who are born as human beings should take active part in all the festivals arranged for Lord Siva and the special rituals are arranged for Mahakaleshwar. The Panguni Uttiram festival is celebrated only on the full moon day in the Tamil month of Panguni. On that occasion, Special *abisekha* is offered to the main deity. They conduct all *Pujas* and festivals in a modest way in accordance with tradition and culture.

The Concluding part clearly reveals that the festivals are arranged to maintain the sanctity of the temple and also for the upkeep of the cordial relationship between God and devotees. They also enhance the status and prestige of the temple above all the rituals and festivals, while making the devotees to assemble in the sacred center called temple. There will be ample scope for unity and solidarity among all people irrespective of the distinctions of caste, color and creed. The Mahakaleshwar temple of Irumbai also adheres to this traditional form of rituals and festivals. On all the Tamil months as per the stipulated asterism, some festivals or other is arranged in this temple. Such regular conduct of rituals and festivals has made this Siva temple as a popular one.

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